A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PERSONAL IDENTITY ACCORDING TO BUDDHISM, NYĀYA AND ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

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TITLE :
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INTRODUCTION : Personal identity means identity of person that makes a person different from other persons. The personal identity can be explained in two ways, first **metaphysical** and second **non-metaphysical.**

Metaphysical we can say that personal identity means the essence of soul. For example in Indian Philosophy Nyāya, Vaisheshika and Vedānta have spoken about the personal identity or self metaphysically.

Non-metaphysical we can say that personal identity means the material body, physical, mental and consciousness of the soul. For example in Indian Philosophy Buddhism, Charvāka have spoken about the personal identity or self.

Here, my topic is Indian background related, where I am explaining three schools of personal identity depending on self theory. These schools are Buddhism, Nyāya and Vedānta.

Buddhist Philosophy agrees that there is nothing human or divine that is permanent. So everything is impermanent and self is not to exist here. Everything is changing and nothing exists in the world, so Buddhists accepted non-self (Nairātmavada). Only stream of consciousness alone is accepting in Buddhist philosophy. So the Buddhists say that consciousness (Vijnana) alone is the self. Being self-effulgent it is sentient, knowledge, pleasure etc, are but its various forms. Being a positive entity it is also momentary. As each preceding consciousness is the cause of succeeding consciousness the stream of ego consciousness (Alaya-Vijnana) is absolutely unobstructed even in profound sleep. In Buddhist Philosophy stream of consciousness which is source of ego-consciousness is called "AlayaVijnaha", that persist/till death. It is the source of abiding notion of self-identity, as distinguished from,**'Pravrtti-Yijnanah**, or the notion of external objects.

Nyāya Philosophy, personal identity was explained in self theory. According to them self is a non-material principle with consciousness as an adventitious attribute. The self is eternal, partless and all pervading substance.

Maharshi Gautam in adducing inferential proof (anumāna) for the existence of the selves states:- **"Ichhā- dvesa- prayatna- sukh- dukha- jñahatmone lingam.** Presence of such experience as desire, aversion, velition krti+prayatna, pleasure, pain and knowledge are the grounds of inference of the existence of the self."[1]

The self theory of Nyāya was acceptable non-reductionism background. Where the self is important rather than the person. They assume the reality of a soul to organic nature. They assume the reality of a substance to account for the unity of our consciousness. Our consciousness is not the same for two moments. Yet there seems to be an identity which makes us remember things and

[1] The concept of self in Indian Philosophy, Lila Mondal, chapter 5

say that we are the same in childhood and old age. To explain this the Naiyayikas assume an eternal self substance, which remains the same, though conscious States Supreme one another from other. But we see that a permanent substance as the underlying reality of ourselves is almost a monstrous and decidedly a fiction assumption. It may be noted that Nyāya theory of self has both similarities and dissimilarities with that of the Rāmānujists.

- According to Advaita Vedānta Philosophy, the personal identity is described as a Non-reductionism point of view. Where Sankara says that the self is subjective reality and Non-different from the Brahman. The Brahman as existence, consciousness and Bliss is the Ātman. Even the empirical self is ultimately the same as the Brahman, therefore Sara says " Jiva Brahmaiva Nāparah". He also says that the self a pure consciousness is ultimately reached from (a) waking consciousness (b) dream consciousness © consciousness is sushupti Or dreamless sleep, and (d) finally in Turia state of samprajñāta and assamprajñāta samadhi. This is very conflicted that though we know what the self is, we do not know the real nature of it.

Sankara says that it is both known and unknown. The 'I' must be distinguished from the 'not-I' which includes not only the outer world, the body and it's organs, but also the whole apparatus of understanding and the senses. But from the metaphysical point of view both orders to phenomena, material and mental are equally objective. The materialistic identity of the self is often accepted with the body or senses. Sankara says that we know the self from subjective point of view not the objective point of view. So the ultimate reality of self consciousness is blissful.

STATE OF THE ART :

There is a unique metaphysical concept in Indian Philosophy that is 'self'. This 'self theory' helps to identify the personal identity subject in my research work. Basically in Western Philosophy, Personal identity can be classified in two categories (a) Reductionism and (b) Non-reductionism. I have expressed my topic early, which is three schools(Buddhist, Nyāya and Advaita Vedānta)of Indian philosophy in the subject of personal identity.

First, I will start with Buddhist Philosophy. According to Buddhism, there is no-self, only state of consciousness there. So metaphysically only consciousness exists, so Buddhist theory falls under reductionism. "Buddhist reductionism is distinguishing between **two sorts of truth- (1) Conventional and (2) Ultimate.** Conventional truth is assertible by common sense and Ultimate truth neither asserts nor presupposes."[2]

"Parfit claims that there are also two possible reductionist views about what a person is :- (1) a person is just a particular brain and body and a series of interrelated physical and mental events, and (2) a person is an entity that is distinct from a brain and body and such a series of events."[3]

[2] Personal Identity and Buddhist philosophy, Mark Siderits, chapter 1.
[3] Personal Identity and Buddhist philosophy, Mark Siderits, chapter 1.

The Buddha described his view of persons as a kind of 'middle path' between the two extreme views of eternalism and annihilationism. By eternalism he meant the view that the person has an eternally existing essence, the self. By annihilationism he meant the denial of an eternally existing essence, the self. Also Buddhist reductionist claims that 'person' is a mere convenient designator for a complex causal series of impermanent, impersonal psychophysical elements. That is, ultimately there are no persons, only physical objects, feeling, perception volitions and consciousness. Still, given our interest, it is generally more convenient to use the one term for such a series, hence the conventional truth of such claims as that there are persons and that person endure over time. But all such claims are ultimately that there are only impersonal psychophysical elements is causal relation. Belief in the self is commonly the result of the process where by a causal series of psychophysical elements comes to think of itself as a person where by, that is, such a series comes to contain a disposition to identify with and appropriate the past and future state of the series. "Thus the Buddhists, specially the Vijñāma - Vadins identify self with the states of consciousness without recognizing any spiritual principle as the subject of such conscious states and process. So the Buddhists say that consciousness (vijñāna) alone is the self. Being self-effulgent it is sentient, knowledge, pleasure etc are but it's various forms. Being a positive entity it is also momentary. Also Buddhist philosophy described the stream of consciousness which is a source of ego-consciousness called "**Ālayavijñāna**", that persists till death. It is the source of an abiding notion of self - identity."[4]

Second, Nyāya Philosophy describes the self as a non-material principle with consciousness as an adventitious attribute. The self is eternal, partless and all pervading substance. So this view of self falls under the concept of non-reductionism. The self (Atman) is too subtle to be perceived. It cannot be perceived through the external sense-organs. It is an object of inference. First, the finite self Atman is inferred from the perception of sound and the other sensible qualities as its substratum. Perception is knowledge or consciousness.

It is produced by the intercourse of the sense-organs with certain objects, Sound is perceived through the auditory organ. Different sensible qualities are perceived through the different sense organs, which are the instruments (Karana) of knowledge. Knowledge as an effect must have a cause. Consciousness is not the quality of an object, because even when an object is not present, there is recollection of it. So recollection is not produced by the object. Hence consciousness cannot be a quality of an object. The internal organ, manas, which is atomic and eternal cannot also be the substrate of consciousness. It is the instrument of internal perception of pleasures, pains etc. and as such cannot be the subject or the agent. Mind is the internal sense producing such sensations. Moreover, the succession of sense perception is effective through the mind. The mind being atomic admits only one sensation at a time, the appearance of simultaneous experience being caused by the rapidity of succession.

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[4] The concept of self in Indian Philosophy, Lila Mondal, chapter 3.

"The Naiyayikas are not clear about the status of consciousness in their theory. They regard the soul by itself as unconscious, and argue that consciousness is produced by the reaction of the soul to organieonature. They assume the reality of a soul substance to account for the unity of our consciousness. Our consciousness is not the same for two moments. Yes there seems to be an identity which makes us remember things and say that we are the same in childhood and old age. To explain this the Naiyayikas assume an eternal self-substance, which remains the same, though conscious states supreme one upon another. But we see that a permanent substance as the underlying reality of ourselves is almost a monstrous and decidedly a fictitious assumption."[5]

Third, Advaita Vedānta Philosophy described that "the personal Identity means pure consciousness self who are ultimately reached from (a) working consciousness, (b) dream consciousness, © consciousness in sushupti Or dreamless sleep, and (d) finally in turia state of samprajñāta and assamprajñāta samādhi. Though we know that the self is, we do not know the real nature of it. Sankara says that it is both known and unknown. The 'I' must be distinguished from the 'not-I' which includes not only the outer world, the body and its organs, but also the whole apparatus of understanding and the senses. In ordinary usage we regard mental states as subjective, and physical states as objective. But from the metaphysical point of view both orders of phenomena, material and mental are equally objective. The materialist identity of the self with the body or the senses."[6]

The personal identity of Indian philosophy is regarding the self theory background. Where my focus is only the existential identity of a person. Three schools of Indian philosophy(Buddhiam, Nyāya, Advaita Vedānta) are describing their different view of the self theory, but they do not focus on identity of person except Advaita Vedānta.

PROBLEMS TO BE INVESTIGATED:

I explain in my research work that in Indian philosophy of three schools Buddhism, Nyāya and Advaita Vedānta describe personal identity with different views. In that theory of personal identity or self Nyāya and Advaita Vedānta are two under the non-reductionism and Buddhism falls in reductionism. I have understood many problems regarding the concept of personal identity. Following are some of these problems-

1) **Buddhist Philosophy says that anything is impermanent. So their doctrine of self is known as no-self theory. But later on through the concept of 'stream of consciousness' they have proved the concept of person exists and the person has taken Rebirth in that process.**

[5] The concept of self in Indian Philosophy, Lila Mondal, chapter 5.
[6] The concept of self in Indian Philosophy, Lila Mondal, chapter 7.

2) **Nyāya Philosophy did not specify how a person will adjust with this ever changing world.**

3) **As per Advaita Vedānta whatever in the world comes in contact with mind and body is completely object. But we are all different individuals with unidentical subjective feelings.**

OBJECTIVE OF THE INVESTIGATION AND MOTIVATION:

Through this research I shall try to put some light on the theories of personal identity described by the three Indian philosophical schools. In describing that my objectives are the following-

1) **Metaphysically, the importance of "Nairātmavada" of the Buddhist is more than the theories described by others, and that is why it attracts me more.**

2) **Nyāya Philosophy claims that personal identity or atman is unconscious. But mind and body works as per their interactions with the outer world's qualities and matters. But atman is not affected by mind and body. This theory is completely contradictory to the Buddhist personal identity concept. So in order to do a comparative study this concept is a part of my thesis.**

3) **In Advaita Vedānta Philosophy Sankara has defined the concept of personal identity in a different way. He said that the self is pure consciousness, has existence and is equivalent to Brahma. Metaphysically this concept is an unic one. According to Sankara, whatever individuals are doing in a rush way is of no value. We are bound to work due to Maya but from the standpoint of inner feelings this things does not exist at all. We would create a different self by realizing that atman is a pure consciousness and form of brahma.**

The researcher's motivation to pursue philosophical inquiry and investigation on personal identity in three schools of Indian Philosophy **(Buddhism, Nyāya and Advaita Vedānta)** is because in personal identity at present time person has more importance his own desire. We are all attracted towards the outer world but don't give attention to own self. I am interested toward the quarry of **"who am I?".**

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS OR RESEARCH QUESTIONS:–

Few questions that are of utmost importance related to the study are the following-

- **What is the nature of the reality of the world around us, and which implications as to our personal destiny can one extract from the answer to the question?**
- **In Buddhist Philosophy, a person is born again in the world. So why is he not a self?**
- **Why does Buddhist Philosophy not explain clearly that person are not exist here?**
- **Which metaphysical theory will be accepted in the modern world?**
- **Personal identity should be clarified in Buddhist Philosophy that no-self theory is dependent on the mind. But the mind is always changing, so how can a person establish his existence?**

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY:

Primarily this research will be done through interpretation of various books, articles, thesis papers either on Sankara's Advaita Vedānta philosophy, Gautam's Nyāya philosophy, and Buddhist philosophy.

SOURCE OF DATA AND TOOLS TO BE USED IN COLLECTION OF DATA :

The research will do this research following a qualitative method. The researcher will collect useful information from various sources like renowned books, research articles and thesis papers.

ANALYSIS OF DATA :

As the researcher will do a comparative study, the most effective method that will be used is **self analysis** of the findings. Obviously, there will be a scope for findings from debates, paper presentations etc.

ITS RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT DAY PROBLEM AND NEED TO THE SOCIETY:

The researcher thinks that the study will help the modern people to look back at themselves. As and obviously as this research is completely about the identity of the self , it will help every reader to access the part way of the Self-realization.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE EXISTING KNOWLEDGE:

I hope that this research work will uphold a new concept about the self which we all have. And above all, the researcher is doing the work for the sake of realization of one's true potential, and if after reading this research someone knows the self better, that will be a success to the work.

FUTURE WORK :

Any interested scholar or journalist may further pursue this research will be the intent of finding new threads and giving them a new outlook.

TENTATIVE CHAPTERS :

Introduction

Chapter one - Meaning of Personal Identity.

Chapter Two - Personal Identity according to Buddha philosophy.

Chapter Three - Personal Identity according to Nyāya philosophy.

Chapter Four - Personal Identity according to Advaita Vedānta.

Chapter Five - A comparative study of personal identity according to Buddhism, Nyāya and Vedānta.

Conclusion
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